Book Review／書評

Hirotake MAEDA, ed.
*The Caucasus, its Diversity and Potentiality: Beyond Ethnic Conflicts*

前田弘毅編
『多様性と可能性のコーカサス——民族紛争を超えて——』


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In the last five years, the Japanese academic world has witnessed an unprecedented and surprising number of publications on the Caucasus. With the help of its strategic importance for the contemporary political world, this momentum of Caucasian studies has been accumulated at the intersection of Middle Eastern studies and Slavic studies. As one of the outcomes of this trend, *The Caucasus, its Diversity and Potentiality: Beyond Ethnic Conflicts* was written with the intention of transcending the gap between these research fields.

The book is based on a series of public lectures held at the Slavic Research Center at Hokkaido University in 2006 and aims to attract a general readership to Caucasian studies by describing the complexity of the region in simple language. Written as an introduction, rather than a survey of the overall picture, *The Caucasus, its Diversity and Potentiality* deals with seven different topics (both historical and contemporary) by seven authors who have published many articles, not only in Japanese but also in English and Russian.

In the preface, while introducing the contents of each chapter, the editor Hirotake Maeda explains the approach the authors share: to observe the Caucasus with emphasis on its relations with the surrounding world. In order to show the validity of this approach, Maeda explains in the introduction that the Caucasus can be
characterized as a “border/periphery (henkyo or syuen)” area. Drawing our attention to its geographical position, and using several examples from the Caucasian history, he shows that the area has been closely related to, and has had a great deal of interaction with, the surrounding world; therefore, Caucasian studies enable us not only to observe some of the common problems of the modern world, but also to achieve a different perspective on the “center” (Russia, Safavid Iran, the Ottoman Empire etc.).

In the first chapter, Tomohiko Uyama, a researcher on Central Asian history, focuses on the history of relations between the Caucasus and Central Asia, not by exaggerating their close relations, but by presenting sober facts. First, he describes the pre-nineteenth century relations between these two regions by examining the history of the Silk Road in terms of its three routes: the northern route (as illustrated by the immigration of nomads), the southern route (as illustrated by the influence of Persian linguistic culture), and the route across the Caspian Sea. Subsequently, he points out that the post-nineteenth century relations were characterized by the fact that the Caucasus and Central Asia were incorporated in one political entity—i.e., the Russian Empire (and later, the Soviet Union). In some aspects, this opened the ways for human mobility and interchange between the Caucasus and Central Asia, through the flow of Armenian merchants into Central Asia, cooperation between Muslims of both regions, and deportation of some Caucasian ethnic groups to Central Asia. Uyama ends his article by explaining that after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, energy pipelines became the key factor in the relationship between the two regions.

In the second chapter, Yoko Hirose examines the geo-political position of the Caucasus in the modern international politics, in which natural resources and conflicts have played a critical role. The Caucasian countries were influenced by the fact that the natural resources under the Caspian Sea have attracted the attention of Western oil companies, who wished to exploit them and to lay the necessary pipelines. Among the Caucasian countries, Georgia and Azerbaijan were inclined to be pro-Western and anti-Russian, while Armenia chose the Russian side. Russia has since conducted a number of interventions into the anti-Russian countries under the pretext of solving local conflicts. Considering the growing interest of the Western countries and the intervention of Russia, Hirose concludes that the small countries of the Caucasus have needed to employ multi-faceted diplomacy in their relations with both Russia and the Western countries.

In the third chapter, Seiichi Kitagawa focuses on the wars in Chechnya against
Russia and analyzes the careers of the Chechen field commanders(4). He reveals that a number of field commanders in the first Chechen war (1994–1996) had military experience in the Soviet Union army and were rewarded with high ranks after the war. In the second Chechen war from 1999, however, as the Chechen commanders of the first war lost their lives or positions, their places were taken by soldiers who came from foreign (mainly Arabic) countries, and were supported financially by foreign foundations. When the leading characters of these foreign soldiers were gone, the leaders of terrorist groups called Jamaat became the main force of the Chechen separatist movement. Kitagawa concludes that because the Chechen separatists lost powerful leaders in the wars, they became unable to fight a major battle against Russia. Therefore, they felt they had no choice but to conduct some acts of violence (such as the Beslan school hostage crisis).

The fourth chapter, which was based on two English articles [Matsuzato and Ibragimov 2005; Ibragimov and Matsuzato 2005], analyzes the Islamic politics and rivalries of tariqa brotherhoods in the multi-ethnic society of Dagestan. Kimitaka Matsuzato describes Dagestan in terms of its multi-ethnicity, piousness, and especially the influence of the tariqa brotherhoods. Then he shows the attempts at centralization at local and community levels that have been made by Said-Afandi Chirkeisky (the sheikh of the Shadhili and Naqshbandi tariqas). Matsuzato outlines the process of the formation of an ecclesiastical hierarchy, the establishment of an Islamic university and the intervention into Southern Dagestan. He illustrates the particular characteristics of Dagestan by explaining that even if there had been many potential causes of conflicts, their intensification was neutralized by the coherence of the territorial communities, nested structure of cleavages, and tradition of ethno-confessional tolerance that had encouraged inter-ethnic alliances.

In the fifth chapter, Tadashi Nakamura analyzes the representation of the Caucasus in the nineteenth-century Russian literature with particular reference to the problem of “self” and “other”(5). According to Nakamura, the Caucasus and its people became representative of the “other” for Russians in the first half of the nineteenth century. While Pushkin projected the notions of “noble savage” and the “sublime” on the Caucasus, his description was based not only on an immanent perspective in relation to Russia, but also on a transcendent perspective that went beyond the limits of time and space. Nakamura argues that while the transcendent perspective (consciously or unconsciously) accompanied complicity with the Russian Empire, the
Immanent perspective enables the authors to describe the “other” as an independent character who could even relativize the Russian “self.”

In the final chapter, Nahoko Matsumoto examines the folk dances, rhythms, and ethno-cultural associations of Turkish citizens of Caucasian origin, and demonstrates the multiplicity and flexibility of their identity. In order to conduct this analysis, she classifies the folk dances into three sometimes-overlapped types. The first is staged dance that is professionalized for stage performance. The second is national dance that governments utilize as the representation of their national cultures. The third—dance by local folk—is the dance performed by ordinary people. Matsumoto reveals that while the Turkish citizens of Caucasian origin had previously borrowed and imitated the national dances of the Caucasian countries as part of their own culture, there is now a tendency to re-estimate and try to “protect” the dance by local folk, which supposedly preserves the “classical” forms of Caucasian dances.

The religious, linguistic, and cultural diversity of the Caucasus is so great that researchers may hesitate to deal with the region as one entity. In order to overcome this problem, the authors of this volume focus on the geo-political position of the Caucasus as a “border,” or a land in between, and put special emphasis on relations with the surrounding world. Even though it is being recognized as an important factor in the age of globalization to pay more attention to “relation with the surrounding world” in studying any other region of the world, this approach successfully brought consistency to this compilation of works, enabling the authors to effectively study the complexity of the Caucasus.

Having discussed the main points of the book, as a reviewer, I would like to be allowed to “cry for the moon” by mentioning the following points. While emphasizing the relations with the world surrounding the Caucasus, The Caucasus, Its Diversity and Potentiality pays little attention to the interaction among the nations within the Caucasus itself. However, in order to deal with the Caucasus as one entity, it seems necessary to examine how the situation or movement of one nation in the area has influenced the others. More focus also needs to be placed on how the Caucasus came to be regarded historically as one entity. In addition to this, an emphasis on the relations with the surrounding world sometimes leads to a neglect of local problems. In order to estimate the importance of these relations, we need to analyze not only the influence of the Caucasians on the surrounding world, but also how the changing circumstances of the surrounding world “connect” to the local problems.
of the Caucasus. Leaving these points to younger researchers, *The Caucasus, its Diversity and Potentiality*, with its fascinating discussion of an assortment of topics, is successfully attracting a wide range of readers to the new field of Caucasian studies.

Notes

(1) Maeda has evolved his arguments on the Caucasus through his profound study on the Georgian *Gholāms* in Safavid Iran [Maeda 2003; 2006; 2009].
(2) One of his many achievements on Central Asia, see Uyama [2007].
(3) She published an article on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in English [Hirose 2007].
(4) Kitagawa’s interest is not restricted to Chechnya. His article on the role of Islam in Azerbaijan, see Kitagawa [2003].
(5) He has an article in Russian on this topic [Hakawypa 2008].
(6) We can read some parts of her argument in English [Matsumoto 2003].

References


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